



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: March 15, 2023

04

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**INCREASING RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AT REGIONAL RESERVOIRS
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

San Diego's reservoirs provide much more to the region beyond storing water. They give thousands of residents and visitors an opportunity to enjoy recreational activities, including fishing, boating, overnight camping, and other day-use amenities. Due to budget constraints, several reservoirs throughout the region that are owned and operated by agencies other than the County of San Diego are not open to the public during certain days of the week.

On November 17, 2021, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to direct County staff to explore the feasibility and costs of providing operational support for the recreational use of unincorporated area reservoirs that are managed by other public entities. County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) staff coordinated with these public entities to identify potential partnership opportunities with the owners/operators.

On May 6, 2022, DPR staff provided the Board with a comprehensive memorandum that included extensive analysis on this issue. Their report included information gathered from the operators, via a public survey, and through individual conversations with interested stakeholders. DPR staff also identified a range of partnership opportunities that could increase recreational access to reservoirs.

Based on this information, we recommend seeking opportunities for funding that will enhance recreational opportunities for residents throughout the County to enjoy the recreational amenities at regional reservoirs. One priority is to seek \$120,000 in annual funding to provide an additional day of operations at the following reservoirs: Barrett, El Capitan, Otay, San Vicente, and Sutherland. The City shared that a five-year commitment from the County would be required for this option for a total of \$600,000. The County looks forward to partnering with the City to seek grant funding.

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Another priority is to seek \$37,518 in annual funding for one Seasonal Park Attendant to assume maintenance and operation responsibilities of the Sweetwater Loop Trail (South Trail). This short-term partnership opportunity would provide enhanced trail experiences for recreational users at Sweetwater Reservoir.

If funding is not identified in consultation with regional partners, today's action would refer to budget deliberations the establishment of appropriations identified herein. As part of the report back to the board at 180 days that will provide an update for collaborative funding, if grant funding opportunities are not identified, the report should also present partner agency funding status.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIRWOMAN NORA VARGAS AND SUPERVISOR JOEL ANDERSON

1. Find that today's actions are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15378(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines because they have no potential to result in a direct physical change to the environment or an indirect and reasonably foreseeable physical change to the environment.
2. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer and the Land Use and Environment Group to work with the City of San Diego, Sweetwater Authority, and other Regional Agencies and community partners to collaboratively seek and apply for state, federal, or private funding opportunities when available to support increasing recreational opportunities at regional reservoirs. as noted in the May 2022 update report provided by the Department of Parks and Recreation.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to report back to the Board of Supervisors within 180 days, providing an update on the collaboration for funding. This report should also present partner agency funding status.
4. If funding is not identified, refer to future budget deliberations the amount of \$637,518 to increase recreational access to reservoirs based on opportunities to partner with other agencies.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Improving recreational access to the San Diego region's reservoirs will enhance the quality of life for County residents and visitors of all ages. Recreational access promotes health and wellness, safe communities, and civic pride for everyone within the region. Expanding the opportunity to access nature and recreational opportunities near water can improve the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional health for our residents.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Seeking funding opportunities for increased hours to recreate will enhance sustainability as the residents of the unincorporated will not have to drive as far to find a reservoir that is open.

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Reducing the amount of vehicle miles traveled for those who use the reservoirs will serve to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

FISCAL IMPACT

If funding from sources outside of the County are not identified, there is the potential for the action to impact the budget in Fiscal Year 2024-2025. However, this action would not approve any appropriations. It would defer the deliberations until the budget is being developed for Fiscal Year 2024-25.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The proposed actions will help businesses and workers in San Diego County through the advancement of potentially expanded recreational programming opportunities at the reservoirs.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

What are commonly referred to as lakes within the San Diego region are impounding reservoirs that are part of the water supply system. Most reservoirs have been available for public use for more than a century. The City of San Diego, for example, has offered public recreational use of its reservoirs since 1913, when the core of the present water storage system was purchased from private operators.

The County of San Diego, along with its valued regional partners, have been recognized as pioneers in providing for multiple recreational uses at water supply reservoirs. The public is provided supervised recreational access for a variety of traditional outdoor activities including fishing, boating, hiking, picnicking, waterfowl observation, and more

This is consistent with existing General Plan policies, including COS-22.1 and COS-24.2, which relate to investment in a variety of recreational programs and maximizing funding opportunities for the operation of recreational facilities.

On June 23, 2020, the Board of Supervisors approved a cost-sharing agreement with the City of San Diego to keep lakes and reservoirs open for the remainder of 2020. The City's Public Utilities Department also stated that they would be conducting a fee study and implementing the necessary adjustments to ensure a reliable funding strategy to keep the reservoirs open long term.

On November 17, 2021, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to have County staff explore the feasibility and costs of providing operational support for the recreational use of unincorporated area reservoirs managed by other public entities. As a result of this action, County Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) staff coordinated with the public entities that manage the reservoirs to identify potential partnership opportunities to help maximize the use of these recreational resources.

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On May 6, 2022, DPR staff reported back to the Board with a comprehensive memorandum that included extensive analysis on this issue. Their report included information gathered from the operators, via a public survey, and through individual conversations with interested stakeholders. DPR staff identified a range of partnership opportunities that could help increase recreational access to reservoirs.

There are 12 reservoirs in the unincorporated area of the County that are currently owned by five different agencies other than the County of San Diego. In addition, some reservoirs contract out the recreational programming operations to a third party via a lease or license agreement. A detailed list of these reservoirs, including the owner agency and operator is outlined in the table below.

Reservoir	Agency/Operator	BOS District
Upper Otay	City of San Diego	1
Lower Otay	City of San Diego	1
Sweetwater	Sweetwater Authority	1
Barrett	City of San Diego	2
El Capitan	City of San Diego	2
Lake Cuyamaca	Helix Water District/ Lake Cuyamaca Recreation and Park District	2
Lake Jennings	Helix Water District	2
Loveland	Sweetwater Authority	2
San Vincente	City of San Diego	2
Olivenhain	San Diego County Water Authority/Olivenhain Water District	3
Lake Henshaw	Vista Irrigation District/Lake Henshaw Resorts, Inc.	5
Lake Sutherland	City of San Diego	5

Providing a safe and reliable potable water supply to customers is the primary purpose of each reservoir. This can limit recreational opportunities at these reservoirs and require close monitoring to protect the water supply. Current recreational operations at these reservoirs are secondary activities that range in terms of the hours of operation and recreational opportunities available to the public. Most of the reservoirs operated by the City of San Diego have multiple recreational opportunities (e.g., shore fishing, boating, row boats, kayaks) but operate on a seasonal schedule with a minimum of one closure per month. For example, Lake Sutherland is open seasonally from March through September, three days per week and closed the third Friday of each month.

DPR engaged each of the five reservoir operators to gather data on current operations, gaps in services and potential partnership opportunities. A series of meetings were conducted from

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November 2021 through April 2022. In addition, DPR staff met with approximately 40 interested constituents and gathered input at the regularly scheduled public meetings of the Parks Advisory Committee and the Fish and Game Advisory Commission. Lake and reservoir operators displayed various levels of interest in working with the County to potentially expand recreational opportunities and bridge gaps in existing services. Common themes included financial and operational challenges with expanding operating hours, recreational amenities (e.g., staffing, ongoing maintenance, and improvements), and procurement of equipment and supplies.

A survey was also sent to a distribution list of over 13,500 interested stakeholders via email and shared through social media channels to gather input from the public and interested stakeholders. A total of 488 surveys were submitted. Results from the survey demonstrated that stakeholders are most interested in increased days and hours of operation, and facility improvements (e.g., campgrounds, bathrooms, picnic facilities, and playgrounds).

After extensive analysis, including information gathered from the operators, via the public survey, and through individual conversations with interested stakeholders, DPR staff identified a range of partnership opportunities that could help increase recreational access to reservoirs.

The City of San Diego operates six reservoirs in the unincorporated area with varying hours of operations and recreational opportunities. Through conversations and meetings with City staff, it was shared that an ongoing cash payment to the City to support reservoir operations would be a potential partnership opportunity. The amount of \$120,000 in annual funding would provide an additional day of operations at the following reservoirs: Barrett, El Capitan, Otay, San Vicente, and Sutherland. The City shared that a five-year commitment from the County would be required for this option for a total of \$600,000.

Sweetwater Reservoir is operated by Sweetwater Authority and is open on a year-round basis with fishing hours varying throughout the year. Recreational opportunities are limited to shoreline fishing and trail use to protect the potable water supply. Over the years, the Sweetwater Authority and the County have worked together to increase recreational opportunities around Sweetwater Reservoir through the development of the Sweetwater Loop Trail. Negotiations are currently underway for the remaining segments, 5 through 10, needed to complete the loop. The potential to increase recreational opportunities at the site would be for DPR to assume the operations of the five-mile South Trail that is currently maintained by Sweetwater Authority. This partnership opportunity could provide enhanced trail experiences for recreational users.

Based on this information, we recommend seeking funding opportunities that will enhance recreation for residents throughout the County to enjoy the recreational amenities at regional reservoirs. One opportunity is to seek \$120,000 in annual funding to provide an additional day of operations at the following reservoirs: Barrett, El Capitan, Otay, San Vicente, and Sutherland. The City shared that a five-year commitment from the County would be required for this option for a total of \$600,000. The other is to seek \$37,518 in annual funding for one Seasonal Park Attendant to assume maintenance and operation responsibilities of the Sweetwater Loop Trail


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(South Trail). This short-term partnership opportunity could provide enhanced trail experiences for recreational users.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

This action to seek more information on the potential of increasing recreational access to reservoirs directly supports the County of San Diego's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan's Building Better Health initiative. Increasing the opportunity for recreational activities would help to ensure that every resident has the opportunity to make positive healthy choices.

Respectfully submitted,



NORA VARGAS
Chairwoman, First District



JOEL ANDERSON
Supervisor, Second District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A -- UPDATE ON PURSUING PARTNERSHIPS TO INCREASE RECREATIONAL ACCESS TO RESERVOIRS (May 26, 2022)